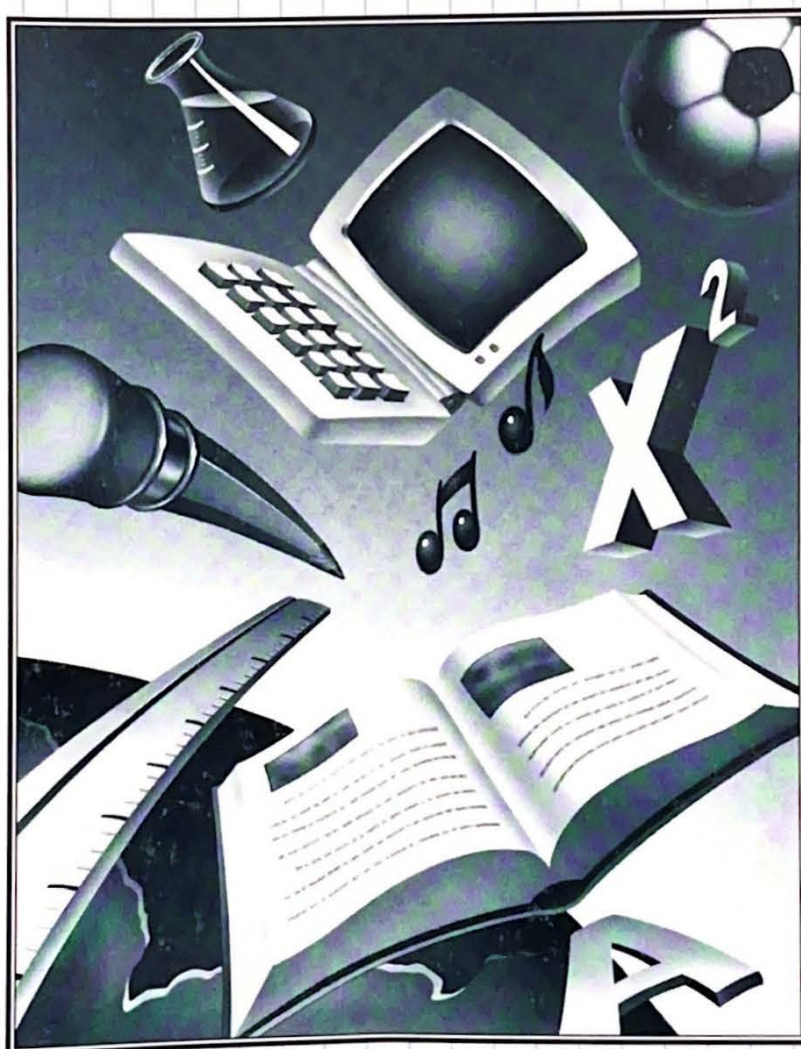


SUNY'S CORE CURRICULA:

The Failure to Set Consistent & High Academic Standards



A JOINT PROJECT OF:

NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS & EMPIRE FOUNDATION FOR POLICY RESEARCH

JULY 1996



NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS
FOR REASONED SCHOLARSHIP IN A FREE SOCIETY

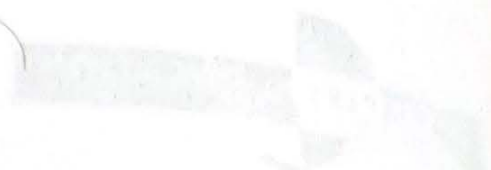
**SUNY'S CORE CURRICULA:
THE FAILURE TO SET
CONSISTENT AND HIGH ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

A Joint Project of:

**New York Association of Scholars
-and-
Empire Foundation for Policy Research**

July 1996

NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OF...



STATE'S CORE CURRICULAR
TWO-BLINDS-TO-SEE
CONSENT AND...
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NOTE: Nothing written herein is to be necessarily construed as reflecting the views of the Empire Foundation for Policy Research or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill or resolution before the New York State Legislature or the United States Congress.

Evidence of decline and devaluation is everywhere. The business community complains of difficulty in recruiting literate college graduates. Remedial programs, designed to compensate for lack of skill in using the English language, abound in the colleges and in the corporate world. Writing as an undergraduate experience, as an exploration of both communication and style, is widely neglected. College grades have gone up and up, even as Scholastic Aptitude Tests and American College Testing scores have gone down and the pressures on teachers to ease their students' paths to graduate schools have increased....Foreign language incompetence is now not only a national embarrassment, but in a rapidly changing world it threatens to be an enfeebling disadvantage in the conduct of business and diplomacy. Scientific and technological developments have so outpaced the understanding of science provided by most college programs that we have become a people unable to comprehend the technology that we invent...

- **Integrity in the College Curriculum:
A Report to the Academic Community**
Association of American Colleges, 1990

[The college] must resolutely face the question of what is important and what is not. It cannot teach everything that any student thinks he would like to hear about or that any teacher thinks he would like to talk about. It cannot pile course on course... It must set up clear and comprehensible goals for its students to reach. It must articulate its courses, squeezing out waste, water, and duplication. It cannot tolerate education by the adding machine, that system by which we mark the intellectual progress of the young by the arithmetic averages they have achieved on a medley of miscellaneous courses...

- **Robert M. Hutchins**
President, University of Chicago, 1929 - 1951
-

*Praise from the Business and Academic Communities
for...*

**SUNY'S CORE CURRICULA:
The Failure to Set Consistent and High Academic Standards**

"This report thoroughly documents the same disturbing findings that the National Association of Scholars discovered nationally in our study The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993. Through general education requirements, more than by any other means, an institution of higher education defines its educational priorities, offering an answer to the critical question 'What should an educated person know?' The answer, at SUNY, apparently is 'Not much.' Hopefully, this report will inspire the SUNY leadership to take its mission to educate students more seriously. At the same time, the report on SUNY's core curricula prepared by the New York Association of Scholars and the Empire Foundation should serve as a model for the review of core curricula in other states."



Stephen H. Balch, Ph.D.
President, National Association of Scholars

* * * * *

"The State University of New York is a pacesetter for the entire nation, thus for the world. The decay of SUNY's curriculum means American higher education is in trouble. A renewal of the vital core of SUNY's curriculum would send a signal throughout the land and across the seas. That's why this report is so timely and so important."



Chester E. Finn, Ph.D.
*Assistant U.S. Secretary, Department of Education (1985-1988)
John M. Olin Fellow, Hudson Institute
Professor of Education & Public Policy, Vanderbilt University*

* * * * *

"SUNY would be greatly benefited by a consistent, intellectually coherent core curriculum. Such a core would better prepare students for the world they will enter after graduation, provide a central focus to SUNY's diverse academic programs, and help ease the transition of students from community colleges to our four-year institutions by offering a consistent set of standards they must meet. This report makes a valuable and timely contribution as the Trustees and the academic community continue to deliberate on the key issue of curricular reform."



Candace de Russy, Ph.D.
Chair, Committee on Academic Standards, SUNY Board of Trustees

"This report documents the startling erosion of academic standards in new York's university system. This is a case-study in the dumbing down of America. Universities are defaulting on most essential duty -- to ensure that all graduates have a grounding in the basic areas of human knowledge. The report should be a wake-up call for parents who care about the education of their children, taxpayers who expect a better return on their investment, and citizens who are concerned about the future of their country."



Jerry L. Martin, Ph.D.
President, National Alumni Forum

* * * * *

"The sad truth is that, as an increasing number of young Americans find it essential to have a college degree, more and more colleges, including those that comprise the SUNY system, are offering courses that the great majority of Americans can only view as devoid of genuine intellectual content. Instead of the core curriculum required of freshmen and sophomores only a generation ago, built around English literature, the history of Western civilization, foreign languages, science and mathematics, students at SUNY and too many of our leading colleges today are turned loose to sample a smorgasbord of trendy courses that would astound and dismay both students and faculty of the 1960s. The study on SUNY's core curricula by the Empire Foundation and the New York Association of Scholars should serve as a wake-up call for SUNY's leaders. As in every other area of the marketplace, consumers will catch on that a product is worthless. SUNY's leaders should recognize that parents and students can vote with their checkbooks for the education that prepares young people for lives as productive and educated citizens."



William E. Simon
Secretary, U.S. Treasury (1974-1977)

* * * * *

"The Empire Foundation and the New York Association of Scholars make an excellent and powerful case for curricular reform. In the report's wake, SUNY should institute a common core curriculum for all of its campuses that is academically rigorous and intellectually coherent. Given where SUNY stands today, reform will be a bold and daunting undertaking."



Arthur Rasmussen
Life Trustee, University of Chicago
Former Chairman, Household International Corp.

* * * * *

"This is a much needed and, I hope, eye-opening report. Its thorough depiction of SUNY's fragmented and incoherent curriculums not only reveals the extent to which SUNY is failing to provide employers a needed assurance that its diploma has real heft. It also demonstrates how SUNY is letting down the thousands of students for whom a public university is the only hope for both upward mobility and for a meaningful introduction to a common, democratic culture."



Kay S. Hymowitz
Senior Fellow, The Manhattan Institute
Contributing Editor, City Journal

1877
The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been elected to the office of Justice of the Peace for the year 1877.

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PREFACE

The National Association of Scholars recently conducted a highly publicized study of curricular change at the nation's leading undergraduate institutions. The study shows that by 1993 the general-education curricula at the top 50 schools had become virtually indistinguishable, with an almost unlimited choice of cafeteria-style offerings meeting general-education requirements everywhere.

A pattern has developed in this nation's colleges and universities whereby students take an odd mixture of courses that do not build on previous knowledge, while avoiding more fundamental and more serious subjects -- subjects that would also increase students' employability. Thus, instead of studying American or modern world history, undergraduate students may take as part of their "core curriculum" courses such as "Psychology of Prejudice," "Horror Literature," or "World Food Crisis," or one of a range of other overly specialized (and sometimes politicized) courses.

The State University of New York (SUNY), too, has participated in this general decline and trivialization of undergraduate education. The quality of a SUNY education has been compromised as a result. Intellectual standards have fallen and students' knowledge has declined in many areas hitherto held central, including knowledge of their own history and traditions, as well as knowledge of mathematics and science.

This study by the New York Association of Scholars and the Empire Foundation for Policy Research is part of an attempt to remedy this situation, where the most costly and elaborate educational system in the United States does not educate, or at least does not educate well. SUNY need not accept low academic standards.

This study should serve "as a wake-up call for SUNY's leaders," in the words of former U.S. Treasury Secretary William E. Simon. Encouragingly, there are some signs that SUNY already recognizes the need for reform. The Committee on Academic Standards, chaired by SUNY Trustee Candace de Russy, has made reviewing general-education requirements one of its priorities. In addition, the SUNY Faculty Senate plans an October 1996 forum on general-education requirements.

This report offers a comprehensive analysis of existing requirements, which should help illuminate these ongoing reform efforts.

Thomas W. Carroll, President
Empire Foundation for Policy Research

Barry Smith, President
New York Association of Scholars

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 1995, the New York State Board of Regents noted: "Too frequently, today's curricula permit students to build schedules that completely avoid academic areas they find uncongenial. Such catering to individual preferences may result in graduates being illiterate in fields essential for constructive participation in modern life."¹

This situation is the direct result of the lack of a common core curriculum for the SUNY system that would set forth minimum academic standards that *all* SUNY students must meet.

This report reviews the core curricula at sixteen SUNY campuses: the four university centers and SUNY's twelve general four-year colleges. At a later date, SUNY's 30 community colleges and 18 health science, specialized, and contract colleges may be reviewed.

A campus-by-campus analysis of core curriculum requirements at the 16 campuses studied herein confirms the Regents' conclusion that SUNY students can avoid essential academic subjects:

- Core curriculum requirements vary widely from campus to campus, thus undercutting the goal of ensuring that all educated students have studied certain key subjects.
- Core curriculum requirements on some campuses are so permissive that students can avoid taking *any* courses in many of the traditional core subjects (history, literature, philosophy, foreign language, arts, English composition, mathematics, and science). On eight SUNY campuses (Albany, Binghamton, Brockport, Buffalo State, Fredonia, New Paltz, Oneonta, and Oswego), half or more of these subjects can be avoided entirely. At Albany and Fredonia, three-quarters or more of them can be avoided. The traditional subjects most often excluded from campus core curricula are philosophy and literature.

¹*The Regents Statewide Plan for the Development of Postsecondary Education* (Albany, New York: New York State Board of Regents, July 1995), Appendix I.

- Three campuses (Binghamton, Buffalo State, and New Paltz) mandate that students take courses in physical education, while not requiring study of many other key subjects. Most dramatically, at the same time that it mandates physical education, Binghamton does not require courses in English composition, mathematics, literature, or philosophy. The courses that qualify for Binghamton's physical education mandate include "Aerobic Dance," "Bicycling," "Bowling," "Scuba," and "Running to Awareness."
- SUNY campuses, in some cases, allow any of dozens of courses to be counted toward a particular core requirement. This cafeteria-style approach undercuts the goal of ensuring that all students share a common intellectual base. At Fredonia, *every* course offered in Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Arts and Humanities, and Social and Behavioral Sciences is counted as a core course.
A notable contrast to this intellectual permissiveness is SUNY Geneseo, which prescribes two specific courses on Western Civilization as the only ones that will satisfy its two-course Humanities core. These courses involve "a search for moral, social, political alternatives and meaning embodied in the institutions, culture, and literature of Western Civilization." One course covers the period up to 1600; the other from 1600 to the present.
- SUNY campuses routinely allow narrow and esoteric courses within a particular discipline to count toward core curricula requirements, thus allowing students to skip broad survey courses that would provide them with the sound foundation -- a general education -- that they will need for later studies and for what the Regents called "constructive participation in modern life." For example, New Paltz allows its Writing-Intensive core requirement to be satisfied with a course titled "Saints, Witches, and Madwomen," Stony Brook allows its Interpreting Texts in the Humanities core requirement to be satisfied by taking such narrow courses as "Feminism: Literature and Cultural Contexts" or "Sexuality in Literature," and Old Westbury allows its Writing and Reasoning Skills core requirement to be fulfilled with "Horror Literature" and its Creativity and Arts core requirement to be satisfied with "Sin and Sexuality in Literature." Similar examples abound on virtually all of the surveyed campuses.
- Ostensibly legitimate core requirements (science and literature, for example) also are subverted by a campus's approval of courses that bear little, if any, obvious relationship to the requirement in question. For example: Cortland allows students to satisfy the literature core requirement by taking a course titled "Literature of Sports," and Old Westbury allows its U.S. Society, History, and Culture core requirement to be satisfied with courses titled "Mental Health" and "Deviance."
- Eight of the 16 surveyed SUNY campuses have crafted core curricula that do not require any courses in Western Civilization. These campuses simultaneously *do* mandate that students attend classes in multiculturalism. These eight campuses are:

Albany, Binghamton, Brockport, Buffalo, Buffalo State, Fredonia, Old Westbury, and Oneonta. New Paltz was in this category until it added a requirement for study of Western Civilization as part of a new core curriculum that applies to students matriculating in Fall 1993 or later.

- “Multiculturalism” classes are a required part of the core curriculum on each of the 16 surveyed campuses. (Binghamton was the sole holdout until recently, when it instituted new general-education requirements applicable beginning with incoming freshman for Fall 1996.) By comparison, traditional core curriculum courses are mandated at fewer campuses: science (15), history (12), arts (12), English composition (11), mathematics (11), Western Civilization (8), literature (4), foreign language (4), and philosophy (3).



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I. INTRODUCTION

Above the entrance to Plato's Academy was the inscription: "Let no one enter here who is ignorant of geometry." Above the entrances to the top campuses of the State University of New York (SUNY) system, the inscription could read: "Let no one assume that our graduates know much mathematics, science, history, philosophy, literature, philosophy, art, or foreign languages."

The modern college or university has two primary goals: to help prepare a student for a chosen occupation; and, to produce an educated, well-rounded human being. At the undergraduate level, these twin goals have classically been met by setting standards for education in each major (economics, engineering, biology, theater, etc.) and by stipulating general education or distribution requirements that all students must fulfill.

General education requirements -- sometimes referred to as a college's or university's "core curriculum" -- seek to broaden a student's exposure to the body of knowledge the possession of which is the hallmark of an educated individual.

As SUNY Plattsburgh's campus bulletin puts it, the goal of a solid core curriculum, however structured, is to ensure that students "become 'educated,' not just 'trained.'" The current lack of uniform curricular requirements for the 64 SUNY colleges and universities, however, makes it unclear what SUNY students are actually learning.

For a large university system such as SUNY, a core curriculum can serve another purpose -- brand name identity. If all SUNY students are covered by consistent core curricula, prospective employers will have a greater sense of what a SUNY diploma stands for.

As a public university, SUNY also has a special obligation to offer the promise of a brighter future to its economically disadvantaged students. Allowing students to graduate with gaping holes in their preparation is a particular disservice to those students for whom a college education is a route to upward mobility.

Certainly, SUNY campuses have a variety of missions and student bodies of differing qualities, but SUNY should nonetheless require that all students study those subjects which are indispensable components of any college education.

A consistent set of general-education requirements also would help community college students transfer more easily and "seamlessly" to SUNY's four-year colleges and universities.

On some SUNY campuses, the foundation for a strong core curriculum already has been laid. Buffalo, Cortland, Geneseo, Old Westbury, Plattsburgh, Potsdam, Purchase, and Stony Brook include many of the traditional core subjects within their core curriculum requirements. Strengthening the core requirements of these campuses would not entail a dramatic shift in current practices.

Other campuses need more work. In the middle of the pack are: Binghamton, Brockport, New Paltz, Oneonta, and Oswego. Most in need of substantive improvement are: Albany, Buffalo State, and Fredonia.

Content -- or the inclusion of most or all of the traditional core subjects -- is, of course, only one measure of the quality of a campus's core curriculum. The "structure" of the core requirements also is important. In numerous instances, SUNY campuses allow students to take any of dozens of courses to satisfy a particular core requirement. The permissive, cafeteria-

like structure of these core requirements subverts entirely the goal of producing educated students.

As SUNY moves forward with curricular reform, it is not without guideposts. The National Endowment of the Humanities, under former chair Lynne V. Cheney, has developed a model "50 hour" core curriculum. And a number of colleges and universities across the nation already have developed reputable cores, including the University of Chicago and Georgetown University, as well as three examples in New York State: Columbia University, Adelphi University, and Union College.

The National Association of Scholars (NAS), in its widely publicized report *The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993*, regarded as "major components of a well-rounded liberal education" the following subjects: English composition, rhetoric, foreign language, history, literature, philosophy, religion, mathematics, and the major social and natural sciences.²

The present report reviews the degree to which individual SUNY campuses include within their core curricula the following eight subjects: history, literature, philosophy, foreign language, arts, English composition, mathematics, and natural science. These are among the principal subjects that must be considered for inclusion in any genuine core curriculum. Those attempting to structure a common core curriculum for SUNY might add or subtract from this list, but, at a minimum, this report provides the participants in discussions about reforming core curricula a common factual foundation.

²*The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993* (Princeton, N.J.: National Association of Scholars, 1996), 4.

II. SUNY CAMPUSES EXPLAIN THE NEED FOR A CORE CURRICULUM

Some of the most cogent arguments in favor of a core curriculum have been made by the surveyed SUNY campuses themselves (although these campuses don't always live up to their own rhetoric). Excerpted from the campuses' annual course catalogs or bulletins, these statements include the following:

- “General education requirements help students to place the more specialized parts of their undergraduate study -- their major and preprofessional training -- in a cultural and historical context. They also develop the intellectual skills necessary to enhance learning during the university years and later. In this complex world, distant places and past history have a major effect on all human life. The knowledge of the variety, richness, and interdependence of the human experience that students gain during their undergraduate years will enrich their future professional and personal life. The person with a broad education in the arts and sciences and with well-developed communication and quantitative skills is most likely to flourish in changing times.”
-- *SUNY at Stony Brook*
- “[General education] prepares students to enter society as well-informed citizens who are ready to grapple with complex societal issues, to research questions not yet sufficiently understood, to carry out critical analyses and make informed decisions, and to enjoy more fully the variety of arts and literature that can contribute significantly to the quality of life.”
-- *SUNY at Buffalo*
- “It is this part of a college education that develops the basic intellectual skills of writing, critical thinking and mathematical analysis, which are the common property of educated persons. Furthermore, the General Education requirements convey some of the accumulated insights about humankind and its cultural achievements, the nature of human society and the natural order, and the systematic ways in which we seek knowledge and understanding in these areas. Finally, the General Education program enables students to make connections among the various courses and disciplines they encounter in college and to apply their skills and knowledge to the real problems in contemporary society.”
-- *SUNY Brockport*

- “The general education requirement is based on the belief that all students who graduate with B.A. or B.S. degrees ought to be required to take a significant number of courses outside their major areas in order to gain breadth. Through the general education requirement and, in particular, through the careful arrangement of a limited number of courses in selected categories, the college hopes to provide for students a general framework for understanding the complexity and diversity of human experience and an intellectual context from which to evaluate critically their own values as well as the values of society. This framework will help students gain the experience, knowledge, and sensitivity necessary to function in contemporary society as educated individuals and to adjust to the pressures and demands of careers and life.”

-- *Buffalo State College*

- “The college seeks to provide students with both a specialized and a general education. The specialized work prepares students in particular fields of knowledge for careers, professions, and other specific goals. But knowledge, like life, is a seamless fabric which cannot be cut into separate pieces. Any special area of knowledge requires a larger context to become fully meaningful. It is the purpose of general education to provide such a context, to help students find a sense of direction and become better able to cope with a changing world, regardless of their specializations. The object of a general education is to further the development of a total human being who seeks to relate learning and living, ideas and actions. Seen in this way, general education seeks to provide the basis for responsible action, and to develop the habit of questioning and of using questioning as a creative tool. The ability to discover and act upon their own values is a basic potential of human beings.”

-- *SUNY Fredonia*

- “[The General Education Program ensures that] students acquire the academic skills and share in the areas of knowledge which should be the intellectual property of all college graduates....[T]he General Education Program seeks to provide an enduring foundation of basic general knowledge, an awareness of how more advanced knowledge is acquired and integrated, and an enhancement of a student’s ability to analyze, evaluate, and communicate that knowledge to others.”

-- *SUNY New Paltz*

- “General Education courses are opportunities to gain skills and insights that will be useful for your entire life, no matter what your choice of major or your career objectives. They will help you acquire discipline, maturity and analytical judgment. They help provide an appreciation of our human heritage, of world problems and ways of acquiring and connecting knowledge. General Education courses will help you become ‘educated’ not just ‘trained.’”

-- *SUNY Plattsburgh*

Within their annual course bulletins, SUNY campuses consistently agree on the value of providing a worthwhile general education program. The principle of truth in advertising dictates that they should offer a core curriculum that lives up to the stated goals.

III. DESCRIPTIONS OF CORE CURRICULA AT SUNY

This report reviews the core curricula at 16 SUNY campuses -- the four university centers and SUNY's 12 general four-year colleges. Excluded from review at this time are the balance of SUNY's 64 campuses, which include SUNY's 30 community colleges and 18 health science, specialized, and contract colleges.

This review was based on each campus's course bulletins and schedule of classes. Consequently, it relies on each campus's representations about its curricula requirements. Actual classroom observation, for example, might reveal *de facto* requirements that are more lax than official course descriptions.

OVERVIEW

Although each of the 16 surveyed campuses has instituted some form of a core curriculum, the features of these core curricula vary considerably.

The core curricula at the 16 reviewed colleges and universities average 43 credit hours, ranging from a low of 23 hours at Binghamton (down from 36 credits prior to this year) to a high of 66 hours at Buffalo State, as illustrated in **Table I** on the following page.⁵

This tabulation includes all generally required courses, regardless of whether they are officially termed "general education" or are part of the "core curriculum" as designated by the campus. Excluded are freshmen orientation classes.

⁵At some campuses (such as Binghamton), a one-semester course carries four credits, instead of the standard three credits. For consistency, in this report each one-semester course is counted as three credit hours.

TABLE I
CORE CURRICULA
TOTAL NUMBER OF CREDITS
 (excluding Physical Education)

SUNY CAMPUS	CREDITS	SUNY CAMPUS	CREDITS
<i>ALBANY</i>	30	GENESEO	33
<i>BINGHAMTON</i>	23	NEW PALTZ	51
<i>BUFFALO</i>	40	OLD WESTBURY	51
<i>STONY BROOK</i>	48	ONEONTA	57
BROCKPORT	36	OSWEGO	45
BUFFALO STATE	66	PLATTSBURGH	41
CORTLAND	55	POTSDAM	40
FREDONIA	36	PURCHASE	33

AVERAGE: 43 credit hours **RANGE:** *Low* -- SUNY Binghamton (23 hours); *High* -- Buffalo State (66 hours)
 (*SUNY Centers noted in italics*)

Each of the 16 campus core curricula is explained below. These descriptions apply to candidates for B.A. degrees. In some cases, less stringent standards apply to candidates for B.S. degrees. In other cases, some students (for example, engineering, nursing, or transfer students) are exempt from these requirements entirely.

Albany: Humanities and the Arts (6 credits), Natural Sciences (6 credits), Social Sciences (6 credits), Cultural and Historical Perspectives (3 credits), Human Diversity (3 credits), and two approved writing-intensive courses. No foreign language required. No college-level mathematics required.

Binghamton: Language and Communication (one course), Pluralism in the United States (one course), Global Interdependencies (one course), Laboratory Science (one course), Mathematics/Reasoning (one course), Aesthetic Perspective (one course), Physical Activity/Wellness (two credits), and a third-semester level course in a foreign language.

- Buffalo: World Civilization (6 credits), Mathematical Sciences (6 credits), Natural Sciences (7 credits), American Pluralism (3 credits), Literature and the Arts (3 credits), Social and Behavioral Sciences (3 credits), Junior/Senior Science (3 credits), foreign language (3 credits), and writing skills (6 credits).
- Stony Brook: English Composition (3 credits), Interpreting Texts in the Humanities (3 credits), Mathematical and Statistical Reasoning (3 credits), Understanding the Fine and Performing Arts (3 credits), Natural Sciences (6 credits), Social and Behavioral Sciences (6 credits), Humanities (6 credits), Expanding Perspectives and Cultural Awareness (3 credits), European Traditions (3 credits), The World Beyond European Traditions (3 credits), American Pluralism (3 credits), and foreign language (6 credits). All bachelors' degree candidates also "must satisfy a writing requirement established in their major discipline."
- Brockport: Fine Arts (6 credits), Natural Sciences (6 credits), Social Sciences (6 credits), Humanities (6 credits) -- one of the preceding eight courses must "offer a 'comparative perspective' focusing substantially on non-Western, Third World, or developing societies" -- Perspectives on Women (3 credits), Contemporary Issues (3 credits), Composition (3 credits), Quantitative Skills (3 credits). An additional composition and quantitative course may be required depending on skill level. In Fall 1996, an upper-level writing component is scheduled for implementation.
- Buffalo State: Applied Science and Technology (6 credits), Arts (9 credits), Humanities (9 credits), Math/Science (9 credits), Social Science (9 credits), General Education Electives (18 credits), Global Issues (3 credits), Diversity (3 credits). Also require college-level skills in English composition, and foreign language proficiency equivalent to the first two years of college-level study. The courses taken to fulfill these latter requirements can be used to fulfill core credits.
- Cortland: American State and Society (3 credits), Prejudice and Discrimination (3 credits), Contrasting Cultures (3 credits), Fine Arts (3 credits), History and the History of Ideas (3 credits), Literature (3 credits), Science, Technology and Human Affairs (3 credits), Natural Sciences (7 credits), Academic Writing (6 credits), Writing Intensive Courses (6 credits), Quantitative Skills (3 credits). Also required is foreign language proficiency, which is achieved "by completing course work through the Intermediate II-level" (12 credits), but which may be waived for students who can demonstrate proficiency through examination.
- Fredonia: English composition (3 credits), further development of writing (3 credits), the development of quantitative or statistical abilities (3 credits), development of oral communication *or* analytical and critical thinking *or* creative/perceptual skills (3 credits), Natural Sciences and Mathematics (6 credits), Arts and

Humanities (6 credits), Social and Behavioral Sciences (6 credits), Integrated, Advanced courses, with at least one course in "cross-cultural or international emphasis" (6 credits).

- Geneseo: Humanities core (6 credits), Fine Arts core (6 credits), Social Science core (6 credits), Natural Science core (6 credits), Critical Reasoning core (6 credits), and a writing requirement in the student's major (3 credits).
- New Paltz: English (6 credits), Mathematics/Analytical Skills (6 credits), Modern World Studies (4 credits), Culture and Civilizations (6 credits), the American Experience (6 credits), Physical and Biological Sciences (4 credits), Foreign Language (3 credits), Social Sciences and Modern Society (3 credits), Studies in Aesthetic Expression (6 credits), and one Writing-Intensive course (3 credits). These core requirements, the result of curricular reform, apply to students who matriculate in Fall 1993 or later.
- Old Westbury: Writing and Reasoning Skills (9 credits), Creativity and the Arts (6 credits), Modes of Enlightenment: Ideas and Ideology (6 credits), International, Cross-Cultural Perspectives (6 credits), U.S. Society, History and Culture (6 credits), Science Cluster (6 credits), Foreign Languages (6 credits), English language skills (3 credits), and computational skills (3 credits).
- Oneonta: Fine Arts (6 credits), Humanities (9 credits), Social and Behavioral Sciences (15 credits), Natural Sciences (9 credits), Math, Statistics, and Computer Science (3 credits), Foreign Language (6 credits), Cultural Diversity (3 credits), College Writing (6 credits). Students also are required to take and pass the College Speech Proficiency Test, and the College Writing Examination. These requirements apply to B.A. degrees; slightly less rigorous requirements are imposed on candidates for a B.S. degree.
- Oswego: Social and Behavioral Sciences (9 credits), Natural Sciences (9 credits), Humanities and Fine Arts (9 credits), Western Heritage (6 credits), Human Diversity (6 credits), Expository Writing (3 credits), and Mathematics/Computation (3 credits). These requirements apply to B.A. degrees; slightly less rigorous requirements are imposed on candidates for a B.S. degree.
- Plattsburgh: Literature or Philosophy (3 credits), Natural Sciences (7 credits), Social Sciences (6 credits), History (3 credits), Arts (3 credits), Foreign Culture and Language (3 credits), Human Experience and Expression (3 credits), Global Issues (3 credits), Written Expression (3 credits), Critical Thinking, Reading, and Speaking (3 credits), Mathematics (3 credits), Library Research Skills (1 credit).

Potsdam: Aesthetic Expression (6 credits), Scientific Inquiry (6 credits), Social Analysis (3 credits), Cross-Cultural Perspective (3 credits), Historical Investigation (3 credits), Philosophical Inquiry (3 credits), Writing and Critical Thinking (4 credits), Speaking, Reasoning, and Research (3 credits), Statistical Analysis and Reasoning *or* Problem Solving and Abstract Reasoning (3 credits), a writing-intensive course (3 credits), a speaking-intensive course (3 credits), and a foreign language course (3 credits).

Purchase: Origins of Western Culture (3 credits), Structure of the Modern World (3 credits), Social and Behavioral Processes (3 credits), Literature and Literary Analysis (3 credits), Quantitative Analysis or Logic (3 credits), Physical and Biological Sciences (3 credits), Experience in the Study of the Visual and/or Performing Arts (3 credits), Non-Western Culture (3 credits), Focus on Race and Gender (3 credits), and foreign language (6 credits).

IV. CONTENT OF SUNY CORE CURRICULA

A review of the content of SUNY's core curricula reveals the following:

- **Core curriculum requirements vary widely from campus to campus, thus undercutting the goal of ensuring that all SUNY students have studied certain key subjects.**

SUNY does not have a *common* core curriculum, and a SUNY diploma could mean very much or very little depending on which campus a student attends and what courses he or she happens to select from the cafeteria-style academic menu. A SUNY diploma does not universally guarantee -- at any level -- that graduates can write well, understand mathematics, or have a broad exposure to the underpinnings of history, literature, philosophy, arts, and science.

A graduate of SUNY Stony Brook will have studied three-quarters of these core subjects, but a graduate of Fredonia will have been able to *avoid* three-quarters of these subjects easily.

Table II, on the following page, illustrates whether each SUNY campus requires students to study history, literature, philosophy, foreign language, arts, English composition, math, and science as part of its core curriculum.

TABLE II

REQUIRED CORE COURSES IN KEY TOPICS

SUNY CAMPUS	HISTORY	LITERATURE	PHILOSOPHY	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	ARTS	ENGLISH COMPOSITION	MATH	SCIENCE
<i>ALBANY</i>	■							■
<i>BINGHAMTON</i>	■			■	■			■
<i>BUFFALO</i>	■			■		■	■	■
<i>STONY BROOK</i>	■	■			■	■	■	■
BROCKPORT					■	■	■	■
BUFFALO STATE				■	■			■
CORTLAND	■	■		■	■	■	■	■
FREDONIA						■	■	
GENESEO	■	■	■		■			■
NEW PALTZ	■				■	■		■
OLD WESTBURY	■		■		■	■	■	■
ONEONTA					■	■	■	■
OSWEGO	■					■	■	■
PLATTSBURGH	■				■	■	■	■
POTSDAM	■		■		■	■	■	■
PURCHASE	■	■			■		■	■

(SUNY Centers noted in italics)

The categories used in Table II (and subsequent charts) have the following meanings.

History: A campus was marked as requiring history if it mandated the study of Western Civilization, world history, American history, or historical perspectives. Courses tagged as "history" but more clearly in the "multiculturalism" mode are discussed separately in Chapter V.

Literature: Any core requirement explicitly labeled "literature" qualifies a campus as requiring study in this discipline. General humanities course requirements were not counted. When a campus lists a core requirement as "arts and literature," it is included in the table as a literature core requirement only when students cannot avoid taking a literature course.

Philosophy: This category includes courses involving the study of epistemology, ontology, ethics, and logic. When a core requirement is listed as "literature or philosophy," "history and the history of ideas," or "humanities," it is included in the table as a philosophy core requirement only when students cannot avoid taking a philosophy course.

Foreign Language: This category includes those campuses that require intermediate-level proficiency or college-level study beyond one year of a foreign language.⁶ (SUNY Stony Brook defines the equivalent of one year of a foreign language, typically two years of high school instruction, as entry level.) If a foreign language requirement is part of a broader core requirement, such as Foreign Language and Cross-Cultural Studies, it is included in the table as a foreign language core requirement only when students cannot avoid taking an intermediate foreign language.

Arts: This category includes courses in fine arts, theater, and music. When a campus lists its requirement as "arts and literature," it is included in the table as an arts core requirement only if students cannot avoid taking an arts course.

English Composition: This category includes English composition courses. Excluded are remedial writing courses, so-called writing-intensive courses (courses from other disciplines in which writing assignments are given and graded as such), and "writing in the major" requirements.

Mathematics: This category includes mathematics and broader quantitative and statistical courses. Remedial courses are not included. If a core requirement is listed as "math/science," it is included in the table as a math core requirement only when students cannot avoid taking a mathematics course.

⁶Campuses that require only entry-level proficiency (the equivalent of one year of college-level instruction) include: Stony Brook, New Paltz, Old Westbury, Oneonta, Potsdam, and Purchase. Binghamton, Buffalo, Buffalo State, and Cortland require intermediate proficiency (the equivalent of 1.5 to two years of college study). No campuses require third-year study or proficiency, as recommended by the National Endowment for the Humanities in *50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, October 1989), 29-31.

Science: This category includes courses in the natural and physical sciences. If a campus lists its core requirement as "math/science," it is included in the table as a science core requirement only when students cannot avoid taking a science course. For purposes of this report, Psychology courses, sometimes listed by campuses under a science core, are considered to be Social Science courses, following the more traditional classification.

It is clear from the data presented in **Table II** that significant gaps in knowledge and skills can result because of the lack of a common, comprehensive SUNY core curriculum.

These gaps in knowledge can be quite severe on some campuses, in fact:

- **Core curriculum requirements on some campuses are so permissive that students can avoid taking *any* courses in many of the traditional core subjects (history, literature, philosophy, foreign language, arts, English composition, mathematics, and science). On eight SUNY campuses (Albany, Binghamton, Brockport, Buffalo State, Fredonia, New Paltz, Oneonta, and Oswego), half or more of these subjects can be avoided entirely. At Albany and Fredonia, three-quarters of them can be avoided. The traditional subjects most often excluded from campus core curricula are philosophy and literature.**

Table III, on the following page, presents the "mirror image" of core requirements illustrating the subjects that can be *avoided* entirely by students attending the 16 surveyed SUNY campuses.

SUNY campuses that require students to study many of the traditional core subjects include Buffalo, Cortland, Geneseo, Old Westbury, Plattsburgh, Potsdam, Purchase, and Stony Brook. Even some of these campuses, however, have certified some courses as fulfilling the core requirements even though they bear little relationship to the core requirement or are too narrow to provide general knowledge of the subject (problems discussed further

TABLE III

KEY TOPICS THAT STUDENTS CAN AVOID
UNDER CURRENT SUNY CAMPUS CORE CURRICULA

SUNY CAMPUS	HISTORY	LITERATURE	PHILOSOPHY	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	ARTS	ENGLISH COMPOSITION	MATH	SCIENCE
<i>ALBANY</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■	
<i>BINGHAMTON</i>		■	■			■	■	
<i>BUFFALO</i>		■	■		■			
<i>STONY BROOK</i>			■	■				
<i>BROCKPORT</i>	■	■	■	■				
<i>BUFFALO STATE</i>	■	■	■			■	■	
<i>CORTLAND</i>			■					
<i>FREDONIA</i>	■	■	■	■	■			■
<i>GENESEO</i>				■		■	■	
<i>NEW PALTZ</i>		■	■	■			■	
<i>OLD WESTBURY</i>		■		■				
<i>ONEONTA</i>	■	■	■	■				
<i>OSWEGO</i>		■	■	■	■			
<i>PLATTSBURGH</i>		■	■	■				
<i>POTSDAM</i>		■		■				
<i>PURCHASE</i>			■	■		■		

(SUNY Centers noted in italics)

below). In the middle of the pack are: Binghamton, Brockport, New Paltz, Oneonta, and Oswego.

The most academically permissive campuses, in terms of allowing students to avoid most traditional core subjects, are Albany, Buffalo State, and Fredonia.

- **Three campuses -- Binghamton, Buffalo State, and New Paltz -- mandate that students take courses in physical education while not requiring study of many other key core subjects.**

Binghamton requires two credits of Physical Education/Wellness. One-credit courses in this area include "Aerobic Dance," "Bicycling," "Bowling," "Scuba," and "Running to Awareness." At Buffalo State, two one-hour physical education courses must be taken. And New Paltz requires the completion of two physical education courses. Options at this campus include "Badminton," "Introduction to Rockclimbing," "Modern Dance," and "Jogging."

All three campuses simultaneously do not require study in college-level mathematics, literature, or philosophy. Most dramatically, while requiring physical education, Binghamton simultaneously does not require courses in English composition, mathematics, literature, *or* philosophy.

Two other campuses mandate physical education (Potsdam and Purchase) but do so as part of a more well-rounded core curriculum. Potsdam allows "Line Dancing" to count toward its physical education core requirement.

V. CONTENT (CONT'D): WESTERN CIVILIZATION & MULTICULTURALISM

The treatment of Western Civilization and multiculturalism at SUNY campuses illustrates the intellectual incoherence of some SUNY core curricula.

- **Eight of the 16 surveyed SUNY campuses have crafted core curricula that do not require any courses in Western Civilization. These eight campuses simultaneously do mandate that students attend classes in multiculturalism.**

The study of Western Civilization offers an opportunity to learn and appreciate the roots of our greatest traditions (the rule of law, representative government, individual rights, etc.) and the origins of every major academic field (philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, science, mathematics, history, literature, arts, etc.). Yet, remarkably, eight of the sixteen surveyed campuses do not include any requirement for the study of Western Civilization within their core curricula (see **Table IV**, following page).⁷ These eight campuses include: Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Brockport, Buffalo State, Fredonia, Old Westbury, and Oneonta.

Even more remarkably, each of these eight campuses simultaneously mandate that students take courses on non-Western cultures and special-interest or "victim-group" studies, course offerings that typically fall under the rubric of "multiculturalism."

⁷Excluded were "global studies" core requirements that either excluded Western Civilization entirely or that included only incidental coverage of Western Civilization (an example of the latter would be SUNY Buffalo's "World Civilization" core requirement).

TABLE IV

WESTERN CIVILIZATION VS. MULTICULTURALISM
CORE REQUIREMENTS

SUNY CAMPUS	WESTERN CIVILIZATION	MULTICULTURALISM
<i>ALBANY</i>		■
<i>BINGHAMTON</i>		■
<i>BUFFALO</i>		■
<i>STONY BROOK</i>	■	■
<i>BROCKPORT</i>		■
<i>BUFFALO STATE</i>		■
<i>CORTLAND</i>	■	■
<i>FREDONIA</i>		■
<i>GENESEO</i>	■	■
<i>NEW PALTZ</i>	■	■
<i>OLD WESTBURY</i>		■
<i>ONEONTA</i>		■
<i>OSWEGO</i>	■	■
<i>PLATTSBURGH</i>	■	■
<i>POTSDAM</i>	■	■
<i>PURCHASE</i>	■	■

(SUNY Centers noted in italics)

True multiculturalism -- the study of the world's many cultures, including those of Asia, Africa, and South America -- has a legitimate place in a core curriculum. But these courses should be taught in a context that includes Western Civilization and that pays proper deference to historical accuracy. The goal should be to learn from, in the words of Matthew

Arnold, "the best that has been thought and known in the world" -- whatever its cultural origins.⁸

But, as the next section of this chapter illustrates, this is not the brand of multiculturalism offered at most of the surveyed SUNY campuses.

Among the critics of the politicized brand of multiculturalism is Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., a former special advisor to President John F. Kennedy, recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes, and author of numerous books. Schlesinger has argued for a more balanced approach to the study of cultures in education:

Our schools and colleges have a responsibility to teach history for its own sake -- as part of the intellectual equipment of civilized persons -- and not to degrade history by allowing its contents to be dictated by pressure groups, whether political, economic, religious, or ethnic.... Our task is to combine due appreciation of the splendid diversity of the nation with due emphasis on the great unifying Western ideas of individual freedom, political democracy, and human rights. These are the ideas that define the American nationality -- and that today empower people of all continents, races, and creeds.⁹

One SUNY campus -- New Paltz -- has moved to correct an earlier bias in its core curriculum against Western Civilization. New Paltz previously did not require the study of Western Civilization, but added (effective for students who matriculated Fall 1993 or later)

⁸In an essay titled "Culture and Anarchy," Matthew Arnold explained: "[Culture] seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely -- nourished, and not bound by them. This is the *social idea*; and men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time..." [Lionel Trilling, ed., *The Portable Matthew Arnold* (New York: Viking Press, 1949), 499.]

⁹Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York, N.Y.: W.W.Norton & Company, 1992), 136-37.

core requirements for "one course from a list of courses that deal with some aspect of Western Civilization from the Ancient period through the Renaissance" and one course from the "'United States Studies' list [which] includes a variety of courses on broad aspects of American culture, history, society, and politics." These Western Civilization courses now are required in addition to New Paltz's multicultural core classes.

- **Multiculturalism classes are a required part of the core curriculum on each of the 16 surveyed campuses. By comparison, traditional core curriculum courses are mandated at fewer campuses: science (15 campuses), history (12 campuses), arts (12 campuses), English composition (11 campuses), mathematics (11 campuses), Western Civilization (8 campuses), literature (4 campuses), foreign language (4 campuses), and philosophy (3 campuses).**

The examples below show that multiculturalism core requirements at SUNY typically are being used to force students to take courses that often have an ideological or political bent. (Geneseo appears to be the only campus that has implemented a multiculturalism requirement without politicizing it.) Instead of a balanced treatment of different cultures, these campuses offer politicized courses that focus on grievances of different groups, whether based on sex, race, or class.

It is one thing for a university or college to offer such courses as electives; it is quite a different matter when such courses are included as core requirements which must be fulfilled to graduate.

The SUNY campuses listed below require multiculturalism courses as part of their core curriculum. Many other campuses not listed here offer similar courses, but do *not* mandate that students enroll in these courses as a prerequisite for graduation.

Albany:

In addition to a 3-credit course in Cultural and Historical Perspectives, SUNY Albany requires completion of a 3-credit course to fulfill its Human Diversity core requirement." These courses are intended, among other things, to "compare and relate aspects of racial and/or ethnic diversity, including gender-related concerns, to the topic of the course." Among the approved Human Diversity courses are the following: "Classism, Racism, and Sexism," "Diversity and Equity in America," "Introduction to Lesbian and Gay Studies," "Introduction to Feminism," and "The Social Psychology of Ethnic Relations."

Binghamton:

In addition to a one-course requirement in Global Interdependencies, SUNY Binghamton also requires its students to complete a Pluralism in the United States core course. Among the approved core courses are: "Multiculturalism," "American Pluralism," and "Poverty and Discrimination."

Buffalo:

In addition to two courses on World Civilization, SUNY Buffalo students must take a course entitled "American Pluralism: The Quest for Equality." This course "introduces students to five important areas of American experience and culture: race, gender, ethnicity, class, and religious sectarianism."

Stony Brook:

In addition to one course on European Traditions and one course on The World Beyond European Traditions, Stony Brook students are required to take one of several American Pluralism courses. These latter courses "explore either our nation's diversity of ethnic, religious, gender, or intellectual traditions through a multicultural perspective or the relationship of a specific ethnic, religious, or gender group to American society as a whole." Course titles include "Sociology of Gender," "History of Jazz," and "The Modern Color Line."

Brockport:

In addition to a requirement that one of the core courses selected by a student in arts, natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities must "offer a 'comparative perspective' focusing substantially on non-Western, Third World, or developing societies," Brockport requires students to take a "Perspectives on Women" course.

Buffalo State:

Buffalo State requires six credit hours in Global Issues and Diversity. Its course bulletin explains: "Given the Eurocentric emphasis in much of American education, a further goal of this [Global Issues] requirement is to encourage students to study the cultures of non-Western and Latin American peoples. The goal in Diversity is to stimulate an awareness of the value and richness of pluralism and diversity in contemporary American society as well as the dangers inherent in bigotry, prejudice, and stereotyping. Ideally, courses that satisfy this requirement should help students develop an increased sensitivity to groups and individuals from traditionally underrepresented populations. Courses should also provide an academic experience in which students can examine their

personal prejudices and values and understand how they affect relationships with others." Approved core courses include "Power, Class and Inequality," "Sociology of Race and Ethnicity," "Sociology of Sex Roles," "Conservation and Environmental Management," "Pollution, the Environment and Society," and "Ethnomusicology."

Cortland: Classes in "Racial and Gender Stereotypes," "Prejudice, Discrimination, and Morality," and "Prejudice and Discrimination" count toward core requirements in American Institutions, Analysis of Values, and Contrasting Cultures at SUNY Cortland. In addition, Cortland requires students to fulfill a 3-semester hour core requirement in "Prejudice and Discrimination." The stated goal of this requirement is "to educate students about the nature and causes of prejudice and discrimination and to help them to understand the extent to which these problems burden people in this country and throughout the world." For the latter core requirement, all of the above classes are approved classes as well as a separate course titled "Philosophical Issues in Prejudice, Discrimination and Morality." Specifically banned from counting toward the Prejudice and Discrimination core are any courses "that fail to consider prejudice and discrimination in the United States."

Fredonia: Fredonia requires the completion of one course with "a cross-cultural or international emphasis."

Geneseo: First-year students are required to complete a Non-Western Traditions core requirement. The purpose of courses classified under this category is "to increase the student's understanding of non-Western issues and/or traditions." SUNY Geneseo's multicultural course offerings, unlike those on other campuses however, are not rife with courses that appear to have heavy ideological and political overtones. Geneseo offers its students numerous classes in feminism, racism, and the like, but these typically are offered as electives and are not included as requirements in the core curriculum.

SUNY Geneseo also balances its multicultural requirement with a two-course interdisciplinary humanities requirement that, in Geneseo's words, constitutes "a search for moral, social, political alternatives and meaning embodied in the institutions, culture, and literature of Western Civilization." Students must take two explicitly prescribed courses to meet this requirement.

New Paltz: New Paltz requires four credit hours in Modern World Studies (which "emphasize the emergence of our present multi-racial, interdependent global society") and 3 credit hours for a course from a "list of courses in Native American, Latin American, African, Middle Eastern, Pacific, and Asian civilizations and cultures."

As part of a new six-credit American Experience core requirement, students at SUNY New Paltz also must take a "Cultural Diversity" course that "focuses on multi-cultural and multi-ethnic experiences in the United States as they pertain to issues such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion." These Cultural Diversity courses include "Women with Women" (which "includes both a historical survey and an analysis of issues facing lesbians in contemporary society"), "Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality," "History of Jazz," "Black English: Language and Culture" (which discusses "theories of origin, structure, and semantics of Black English in America; [and] comparisons with Standard American English").

Old Westbury: As part of its Modes of Enlightenment core, Old Westbury requires one course in "ideology and ideological institutions such as racism, sexism, and issues of social class." As part of its International, Cross-Cultural Perspectives core, Old Westbury requires two courses in "international studies, non-Western cultures and comparative or cross-cultural analysis." Core courses include "Psychology of Prejudice" and "Psychology of African-Americans."

Oneonta: Oneonta has a three-credit hour Cultural Diversity core requirement. Among other approved courses is one titled "Gender, Power, and Difference" and another titled "Religion, Magic, and Myth."

Oswego: Oswego requires that two courses be taken to satisfy its Human Diversity core, in such areas as "race and gender in U.S. society" and non-Western nations. SUNY Oswego, however, also requires an approved two-course combination in the Western heritage.

Plattsburgh: In addition to a core requirement for History and for Foreign Culture and Languages, SUNY Plattsburgh has a Global Issues core requirement. Students "should, through this category, come to appreciate the global ramification of such problems as the distribution of food, energy, the use and abuse of nuclear and political power and common environmental, political, economic, cultural and technological challenges we face not only within but beyond our borders." Among other approved courses are ones titled "Feminist Framework," "Global Perspectives on Women's Issues," "Environmental Ethics," and "Chemistry, Culture and Society."

Potsdam: SUNY Potsdam has a Cross-Cultural Perspective core requirement. The course "compares and contrasts cultures with one another and studies their interaction."

Purchase: In addition to its Origins of Western Culture core, Structure of the Modern World core, and Non-Western Culture core, SUNY Purchase imposes a Focus on Race and Gender core requirement. Under this core, students are required to study issues concerning minorities, women, and gays and lesbians through such course offerings as "Lesbian and Gay Fiction," "Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Drama," "Gender and Power," and "Social Psychology of AIDS."

VI. STRUCTURE OF SUNY CORE CURRICULA

In designing a core curriculum, the "structure" of the core requirements is as important as their "content" (discussed in Chapters III, IV, and V).

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) in its recent study offers a useful explanation of the importance of core curriculum structure:

The extent to which a general education requirement has structure reflects the institution's willingness to make basic choices about what its students should learn. Put another way, a structured general education requirement is the clearest expression of an institution's willingness and ability to set educational priorities.

By "structure" we mean the limitations placed on student choice as the result of general education requirements described in the catalogues. For example, many of the general education requirements...mandated the completion of specific courses....Such mandates represent the greatest amount of curricular constraint.

Without mandating a particular course, institutions also limit choice by requiring that students choose one or several courses from among a small set. When this process involved the grouping of a set of courses in which the ratio between the courses required and the courses available was one-to-six or less we called that set a "cluster." The changing incidence of such clustering was one of our measures of the varying degree of curricular constraint....¹⁰

A review of SUNY's core curricula reveals an almost total lack of structure. With the exception of English composition and foreign language requirements (where approved courses are either prescribed or clustered), in almost every instance the surveyed campuses allow students to choose from dozens of courses for each separate core requirement. A notable exception is SUNY Geneseo's prescribed two-course sequence for the study of Western Civilization.

¹⁰*The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993* (Princeton, N.J.: National Association of Scholars, 1996), 3-4.

- **SUNY campuses, in some cases, allow any of dozens of courses to be counted toward a particular core requirement. This cafeteria-style approach undercuts the goal of ensuring that all students share a common intellectual base.**

Students easily can avoid important or demanding courses because of the vast array of courses that are approved as counting toward individual components of a campus's core curriculum.

One of the most lax campuses is SUNY Fredonia, where *every* course offered in Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Arts and Humanities, and Social and Behavioral Sciences is counted as a core course. Buffalo State is a more typical example, providing a list of approved courses within each core. Yet, these course offerings number in the dozens for some core requirements. This cafeteria-style approach allows students to choose courses such as "Philosophy of Love and Sex" to satisfy the Humanities core.

- **SUNY campuses routinely allow narrow and esoteric courses within a particular discipline to count toward core curricula requirements, thus allowing students to skip broad survey courses that would provide them with the sound foundation -- a general education -- that they will need for later studies and for what the Regents called "constructive participation in modern life."**

The purpose of core requirements is to give students courses that provide a broad understanding of a given subject, in many cases whetting their appetite for further study. Too often, however, SUNY campuses certify courses as "core" classes which are narrow and esoteric. While some of these courses may be worthwhile for students to take as an elective or as part of a major, they are not appropriate as core courses. Some examples are provided below.

Albany:

Albany allows students to satisfy its 3-credit hour Cultural and Historical Perspectives core with a course titled "Puerto Rico: People, History, and Culture." While few would dispute that students could learn from this course, a student will have a narrow appreciation of world history if the only college-level history course they took was on Puerto Rico. Similar objections could be raised toward SUNY Albany's inclusion of "American Indian Archaeology" to satisfy the same core. These courses do not appear to meet the campus's stated purpose of the Cultural and Historical Perspectives core, which is to "provide students with an understanding of diverse cultural vantage points and world views" -- not the study of one island or one ethnic group.

Similarly, Albany's six-credit Humanities and Arts core can be satisfied, in part, by taking a narrow course called "Ethnology of Pre-Columbian Art."

Binghamton:

At SUNY Binghamton, students can satisfy the Global Interdependencies core requirement by taking a Women's Studies course titled "Film and Society" (focusing on "how women are portrayed in film"), the Science core by taking a narrow geology course titled "Igneous and Metamorphic Petrology" ("introduction to the classification, global distribution, and origin of igneous and metamorphic rocks in the context of plate tectonics"), and the Aesthetic Perspective core by taking a course titled "Gender, Class & Grimm's Fairy Tales."

Stony Brook:

Stony Brook allows students to satisfy its Interpreting Texts in the Humanities core by taking narrow courses such as "Feminism: Literature and Cultural Contexts," "The Legend of King Arthur," and "Sexuality in Literature."

Cortland:

Cortland allows students to take narrow courses such as "Introduction to the Literature of India" to satisfy its Literature core.

Geneseo:

SUNY Geneseo allows its Non-Western Traditions core to be satisfied with narrow courses such as "Myths and Folktales of American Indians."

New Paltz:

SUNY New Paltz allows its Writing-Intensive core requirement to be satisfied with a course titled "Saints, Witches, and Madwomen."

Old Westbury:

The Writing and Reasoning Skills core at Old Westbury can be satisfied with such narrow courses as "Women's Voices," "Environmental Literature," and "Horror Literature." The Creativity and Arts core can be satisfied with courses such as "Sin and Sexuality in Literature."

- **Ostensibly legitimate core requirements (science and literature, for example) sometimes are subverted by a campus's approval of courses that bear little, if any, obvious relationship to the requirement in question.**

While too narrow core-fulfilling courses can be approved by SUNY campuses, courses also can be allowed to fulfill core requirements even if they have little if any relation to the core subject. Examples from a number of campuses help illustrate this point, and are listed below:

Albany: SUNY Albany's students can satisfy its Writing Intensive core by taking "Introduction to African/African-American History," "Anthropology of Gender," "Environmental Economics," or "Solar Energy." Students also can satisfy the Natural Sciences core by taking "World Food Crisis."

Cortland: Cortland allows a student to satisfy the literature core requirement by taking a course titled "Literature of Sports."

Old Westbury: Old Westbury allows its U.S. Society, History, and Culture core to be satisfied with courses titled "Mental Health" or "Deviance," and its Writing and Reasoning Skills core to be satisfied with courses such as "Multicultural Perspectives."

VI. CONCLUSION: THE NEXT STEPS

As this report thoroughly documents, SUNY appears to have been unable to avoid the decline in standards that has afflicted much of modern higher education in the United States. The Association of American Colleges correctly diagnosed the problem:

As for what passes as a college curriculum, almost anything goes. We have reached a point at which we are more confident about the length of a college education than its content and purpose....Fads and fashions, the demands of popularity and success, enter where wisdom and experience should prevail.¹¹

SUNY need not accept low academic standards. SUNY campuses already have the authority to independently reform their core curricula. And, if the campuses fail to act or fail to act properly, the SUNY Board of Trustees has the legal authority to set academic standards for the campuses.

The time for reform could not be better. First, the SUNY Board of Trustees has seven new members with several more on the way, who are unshackled by the "this is the way we've always done it" philosophy.

Second, the SUNY Board of Trustees has installed new campus presidents at Albany, Buffalo State, and New Paltz. The Board also has the opportunity to fill expected presidential vacancies at Brockport, Fredonia, Oswego, and Potsdam. These new presidents can be the engine for reform on their own campuses. Moreover, the Trustees have the opportunity to appoint a new Chancellor and Academic Provost for the SUNY system.

¹¹*Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 2nd ed., 1990), 2.

Third, the State Education Commissioner and Board of Regents have approved an ambitious plan to raise academic standards for elementary and second education. Raising standards at the postsecondary level is a logical next step, and will lend added force to the efforts to raise academic standards in high schools.

Fourth, although the quality of core curricula varies greatly from campus to campus, a consensus exists among the SUNY campuses themselves that a solid core curriculum is desirable, as discussed in Chapter II.

Although the time is ripe for reform, all participants should be mindful of the repeated attempts that have been made on different campuses to institute a coherent core curriculum, efforts which have almost always failed. Good intentions on all sides have resulted in compromise "distribution requirements" -- course catalogs that preserve too much of the earlier cafeteria-style format and leave little room for an organized grouping of courses that allow students to accumulate knowledge in meaningful fashion from semester to semester.

A major obstacle to reform is expected opposition from some elements of the faculty at SUNY. Many faculty members have an understandable preference for teaching upper-level courses on subjects closely related to their areas of specialized research. They thus might seek to thwart the imposition of genuine core curriculum requirements at their respective campuses, since they fear that such requirements will impose extra demands on them. Faculty members must be encouraged to regard providing the genuine education which a core curriculum offers as a part of their primary responsibility to the university.

Reformers also need to understand that stronger general-education requirements do not mean "a curriculum consisting of vaguely generalized courses, handled by vaguely educated

teachers," warns Clarence H. Faust, former Dean of the College, University of Chicago (1941-47). Faust correctly notes: "What is needed, however difficult it may be to secure, are general courses which deal rigorously with basic principles under the direction of teachers who have been educated not merely in departmental specialties but in the fundamental disciplines common to the field of the social sciences or the humanities or the natural sciences."¹²

Similarly, the mere prescription of required courses in the appropriate subjects should not be mistaken for knowledge. SUNY may want to consider testing students to determine the effectiveness of general-education courses. For example, in the area of English composition, samples of written work of a randomly selected fraction of the students might be taken at the beginning and the end of the relevant semester and then compared for progress.

Given expected opposition and the difficulty of reforming curricula in a meaningful way, two preliminary steps might be in order.

First, the SUNY Board of Trustees may want to develop a "model" core curriculum for individual campuses to emulate. A high-profile effort to develop a model core curriculum for the nation's largest public university system would attract some of the most eminent thinkers and scholars in the nation, a resource that would not necessarily be available to individual campuses. Such an effort also would avoid unnecessary duplication of effort on each of SUNY's 64 campuses.

¹²Clarence H. Faust, "The Problem of General Education" in F. Champion Ward, ed., *The Idea and Practice of General Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8-9. Faust served as Dean of the College of the University of Chicago from 1941 to 1947.

Second, SUNY may want to experiment with an intellectually coherent curriculum on a few select campuses. Starting with campuses led by presidents who are most committed to the goal of a core curriculum makes obvious sense.

These two preliminary steps could set the stage for broader reform. Implementing a coherent core curriculum is a challenging endeavor, but the alternative of allowing succeeding classes of SUNY students to graduate without adequate preparation is not acceptable.

